

Buck Creek Commercial Thinning Harvest
EA# OR-104-98-16
Decision Document

An Interdisciplinary (ID) Team of the Swiftwater Resource Area, Roseburg District, Bureau of Land Management has analyzed the proposed Buck Creek Commercial Thinning Harvest. This analysis and the "Finding of No Significant Impact" (FONSI) was documented in Environmental Assessment (EA) No. OR-104-98-16. The thirty day public review and comment period was completed on September 17th, 1998. One letter with comments was received from Francis Eatherington representing Umpqua Watersheds as a result this review.

The Swiftwater Resource Area Manager has decided to implement Alternative B (Late-Successional Enhancement) which was identified in the EA as the preferred alternative. The preferred action involves the commercial thinning harvest of young timber in the East Elk Creek watershed located in Section 3, T22S R4W, W.M. Harvest activities will occur on 315 acres of thinning and four acres of road right-of-way clearcut and harvest approximately 3.7 MMBF of timber. Approximately 1.2 miles of road will be constructed wholly on government land all of which will be temporary and tilled after use and returned to the productive land base. Approximately 2.3 miles of private road will be renovated and improved.

The following objectives will be met by this proposal:

1. Practice ecosystem management as outlined in the ROD and RMP (EA, pg. 2).
2. "Produce a sustainable supply of timber and other forest commodities" (RMP pg. 33) and meet District PSQ goals.
3. Improve stand health by reducing the excess stocking in the forest stand in order to increase growth and vigor of the remaining individual trees and treating pockets of root diseases.
4. Meet the objectives for Connectivity (RMP pg. 150).

Decision

It is my decision to authorize the implementation of the ID Teams' Proposed Alternative (Late-Successional Habitat Enhancement). Section II of the EA describes the Proposed Action as well as four other alternatives that were considered. The following summary discloses why those alternatives were not selected:

The **No Action Alternative** was not selected because the EA did not identify any impacts that could not be mitigated through project design features.

Alternative A (Density Management) was not selected because entry would have taken place in much of the 123 acres that was considered Late-Successional Habitat (LSH). An

objective of Connectivity is to maintain 25% of the block in late-successional forest. This block only has three percent in this category presently. An additional 23%, although not late-successional forest, has enough components of late-successional forest to function as such. Also this alternative only treated large (>2 ac.) disease pockets.

Alternative C (Hydrologic Protection) was not selected because it would not have permitted entry into the Riparian Reserves (except to treat disease pockets). This alternative would not have realized the Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) objective #8 to "... restore ... structural diversity of plant communities ..."

Alternative D (Stand Health) was not selected because of the same reasons as Alternative A.

1. The EA (pg. 5) stated that the project would "occur on 250 acres ...". This acreage was an estimate. The actual figure is 319 acres.
2. The decision will include the use of sporax to control fomes annosus root disease in Western hemlock and true firs on approximately 123 acres.

The sale date is planned for September 22, 1998 and the expected implementation of the project would begin in the summer of 1999. The contract duration will be 36 months. The project design features for this alternative are listed on pages 5 through 7 of the EA. These features have been developed into contract stipulations and will be implemented as part of the timber sale contract.

Sale layout includes the following design features:

1. A 200' no harvest Riparian Reserve will be maintained along each side of all perennial and intermittent nonfish bearing streams and trees will be directionally felled parallel to or away from these areas.
2. Five wet areas less than one acre will be reserved from harvest.

Decision Rationale

The Preferred Alternative meets the objectives for Matrix lands and follows the principles set forth in the ROD, dated April 13, 1994 and the RMP, dated June 1995.

Cultural clearance with the State Historical Preservation Office was completed and resulted in a "No Effect" determination.

Consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for this project has been completed. The Biological Opinion concluded that the proposed action is "... not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the bald eagle, peregrine falcon, spotted owl or murrelet or adversely modify designated critical habitat for spotted owl or murrelets".

Consultation under Section 7(a)(4) of the Endangered Species Act has not been completed with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on the Umpqua River cutthroat trout, Oregon Coast steelhead trout and Oregon Coast coho salmon. The sale contract will not be awarded until a final biological opinion or letter of concurrence, which includes a non-jeopardy determination, has been received. The sale was designed to follow the guidance of the RMP and the NFP, and to incorporate mitigations identified in the consultations on previously listed salmonids, as appropriate. Therefore, it is our expectation that the Biological Opinion will not make a jeopardy determination nor prescribe any reasonable and prudent measures or terms and conditions that are not already part of the sale design and mitigation. Because the United States retains the right to reject any and all bids for any reason, the mere offering of the sale does not make any irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources which have the effect of foreclosing the formulation or implementation of any reasonable and prudent alternative measures. If additional reasonable and prudent alternative measures or terms and conditions are prescribed which would require alteration in the terms of the sale contract, the agency retains the discretion (prior to contract award) to adjust the sale design accordingly and readvertise the sale if necessary.

This project received extensive review for consistency with the Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) objectives by the ID Team as well as the Level I Team during formal consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). A finding of consistency was made in the FONSI subject to completion of consultation with NMFS.

This decision is based on the fact that the Preferred Alternative implements the Standards and Guidelines (S&Gs) as stated in the ROD and RMP. The project design features as stated in the EA would protect the Riparian Reserves, minimize soil compaction, limit erosion, protect slope stability, wildlife, air, water quality, and fish habitat, as well as protect other identified resource values. Impacts to these resource values would not exceed those identified in the ROD or in the RMP. Although the No Action Alternative would have the least impacts on the environment, the Preferred Alternative provides timber commodities with impacts to the environment at a level within the bounds of the ROD and the RMP.

Comments were solicited from affected tribal governments, adjacent landowners and affected State and local government agencies. No comments were received. During the thirty day public review period, comments were received from Umpqua Watersheds, Inc. (Francis Eatherington). None of the comments provided new information which should be considered in this decision. Most of the comments are the result of a difference of interpretation over the Northwest Forest Plan ROD or opposition to harvest on Federal lands. The following comment warrants clarification:

! An examination of the new EA shows no information on surveys of caves for bats.

This feature was examined by the wildlife biologist who found no presence of bats nor is this feature considered bat habitat that should be afforded any specific protection.

Compliance and Monitoring

Monitoring will be conducted as per the guidance given in the ROD and the RMP.

Protest and Appeal Procedures

As outlined in Federal Regulations 43 CFR, 5003.3, "Protests of ... Advertised timber sales may be made within 15 days of the publication of a ... notice of sale in a newspaper of general circulation." Protests shall be filed with the authorized officer (John L. Hayes) and shall contain a written statement of reasons for protesting the decision. Protests received more than 15 days after the publication of ... the notice of sale are not timely filed and shall not be considered. Upon timely filing of a protest, the authorized officer shall reconsider the decision to be implemented in light of the statement of reasons for the protest and other pertinent information available to him/her. The authorized officer shall, at the conclusion of his/her review, serve his/her decision in writing to the protesting party. Upon denial of a protest ... the authorized officer may proceed with the implementation of the decision.

For further information, contact John L. Hayes, Area Manager, Swiftwater Resource Area, Roseburg District, Bureau of Land Management, 777 NW Garden Valley Blvd; Roseburg, OR. 97470, 541 440-4931.

John L. Hayes, Area Manager
Swiftwater Resource Area

Date